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V.—A LATIN POETICAL IDIOM IN OLD ENGLISH.

There is a poetical use of the Old English noun *láf* which deserves more attention than has yet been bestowed upon it. In the idiom referred to it occurs in conjunction with a dependent genitive (usually plural and prepositive) in the sense of 'that which has escaped from,' or 'that which has been formed or fashioned by' some object or objects. For our purpose it is important to distinguish these two senses of *láf*. In the former case the noun in the genitive denotes a weapon, or some dangerous or terrible object; in the latter it denotes some tool or instrumentality employed in artistic production. The phrases under consideration may accordingly be divided into two classes, designated as class A and class B.

Class A includes: *sweorda láfe*, Beow. 2937; *láfes lagostða*, Gen. 1343; *wradðra láfe*, Gen. 1496; *wætra láfe*, Gen. 1549; *wæpna láf(e)*, Gen. 2005, Dan. 74; *gára láf*, Gen. 2019; *swóles láfe*, Phœn. 269; *ádes láfe*, Phœn. 272; *fýres láfe*, Phœn. 276; *darepa láf*, Brunanb. 54. To these may be added the compounds *wéaláf(e)*, Beow. 1084, 1098, Met 1²²; *jðláf*, Beow. 566, Exod. 585, An. 499; *egeláf* (MS *ece láf*), Exod. 370; *sérláf*, Exod. 584.

Class B includes: *homera láfe*, Beow. 2829, Riddle 6⁷; *hamora láfum*, Brunanb. 6; *fíla láfe* (MS *láf*), Beow. 1032, *féole láf*, Riddle 70⁸; *fýres láf*, Riddle 70⁸. *Láfe*, Riddle 57¹⁰, does not admit of being classified with any certainty, because of the mutilation of the probable genitive.

This use of the word appears to be peculiar to Old English among the Germanic dialects. Is it, therefore, absolutely singular and anomalous? The affirmative cannot be maintained, since a similar construction occurs in the most popular of Latin poets, and in the accepted model of prose Latinity. That these authors were known by English scholars of the 7th and 8th centuries, and that the style of Virgil was imitated by the Anglo-Latin poets of that period, requires no further proof than the explicit statements of Wright (*Biographia Britannica Literaria*, Anglo-Saxon Period, pp. 37-42). If Virgil was thus imitated by the Anglo-Latin poets, is it unlikely that a Virgilian idiom might find its way into Old

English poetry? No portion of Virgil has been more universally read and studied than the beginning of the Aeneid, and it is precisely there (Aen. I 30) that the phrase *reliquias Danaum* occurs. But, again, this is not an isolated occurrence, since it is also found I 598 and III 87. The *reliquias Danaum* is precisely the Old English idiom in respect to form and sense. What hinders us from assuming, then, that it is the original of this idiom? It may be answered that the phrase is somewhat strained and unnatural. To this Wright replies: "They chose, in preference to all others, those expressions, or words, or uses of words, which ought not to be imitated, being exceptions to rules . . . ; and these expressions, because they were strange and uncommon, they repeated over and over again with lavish profusion . . . The early Anglo-Latin poets delighted in nothing more than ingenious conceits, enigmatical expressions." But again it may be objected that the Virgilian phrase is palpably a Grecism, and suggested by Aeschylus, Agam. 517:

στρατὸν δέχεσθαι τὸν λελειμμένον δορός.

"The army to receive, the war-spear's leavings."

If a Grecism, it is at all events one which has the sanction of Cicero (De Senectute, 6, 19): "quam palmam utinam di immortales, Scipio, tibi reservent, ut *avi reliquias* persequere." Admitting it to be a Grecism, however, our assumption is not invalidated. Wright continues: "The narrow partiality of Theodore, Adrian, and their scholars, for the study of Greek, had given a wrong turn to their literary taste; and this appears in the multitude of Greek words and expressions which they grafted upon the Latin language."

It is somewhat remarkable that three of the phrases in class A are found in the Phœnix within a compass of eight lines. The Latin poem on which the Old English Phœnix is based is usually ascribed to Lactantius, the "Christian Cicero," so-called because of his assiduous study of the Roman classic, and of the finish which he thus succeeded in imparting to his style. Ten Brink (with Dieterich, Gäbler, and Wülcker), assigns the composition of the Old English Phœnix to Cynewulf (Early English Literature, p. 56): "The rendering of the Latin poem of the Phœnix, from its relation to the resurrection, belongs to the same class . . . The elegance and precision of expression, characteristic of this poem, are necessarily impaired in Cynewulf's

unevenly diffuse treatment." Furthermore, Cynewulf was in some sense a disciple of Aldhelm; Ten Brink (Early Eng. Lit. p. 51) declares: "Aldhelm's example had great influence, perhaps in certain things a decisive influence upon Cynewulf . . . Cynewulf borrowed many of his themes from Aldhelm." Concerning Aldhelm we are told by Wright (p. 45): "He was a great imitator of the ancients; he was a celebrated Greek scholar, and he filled his writings with foreign words and clumsy compounds; he was also a lover and composer of Anglo-Saxon verse."

The *catena* of arguments, so far as relates to the Phoenix, is therefore as follows: The Latin original is to be assigned to the period, and perhaps to the pen of Lactantius, a close student of Cicero, in whom the phrase *avi reliquias* occurs; the Old English poem of the Phoenix is the production of Cynewulf, who wrote under the influence of Aldhelm, an author of Old English as well as Latin verse; Aldhelm is known to have quoted and imitated Virgil, and would be more likely than not to imitate his Grecisms, esteeming them beauties rather than blemishes; Cynewulf himself must have been a Latin scholar, and therefore, no doubt acquainted with the Virgilian phrase in question, and, as a student of Lactantius, *perhaps* acquainted with the Ciceronian phrase; hence there is no intrinsic improbability in the assumption that *swóles láfe*, *ádes láfe* and *fýres láfe*, Phœn. 269, 272, 276, are imitated from the Latinity of Virgil and Cicero. It must be admitted that nothing similar to this phrase appears in the Latin original of this particular passage, which has only

"Quicquid de corpore restat,
Ossaque vel cineres exuviasque suas";

but this circumstance is of comparatively slight moment.

How then, it may be asked, is the occurrence of the idiom in the other poems to be accounted for? It is well known that the epic phraseology was largely conventional and traditional; hence the popularity of the Phoenix might explain why similar expressions are found in the battle of Brunanburh and the Metres of Boethius. As for Beowulf, Genesis, Exodus and Daniel, the phrases were either added in a late redaction, or the idiom was familiar to the scholars who first reduced them to writing, and who must have known something of Latin, and probably therefore of Virgil.

But can the idiom exemplified in class B be similarly explained? I think it can, if we admit the popularity of Pliny in the early

Middle Ages, which is notorious, and in England, for which the evidence is again brought forward by Wright (p. 37). Pliny makes the following statement (34, 7, 18): "Fecit et Sp. Carvilius Jovem . . . Reliquiis limæ suam statuam fecit, quæ est ante pedes simulacri ejus." It is upon the *reliquiis limæ* that an argument must be founded. This would appear to be identical with *féole láfe*, and if it were actually so, the proof would be almost overwhelming. The *reliquiæ limæ*, however, can be nothing else than the Greek *ρίνημα*, while the *féole láfe*, being that which is *spared* by the file, is rather to be compared with the statue of Jupiter, which Pliny is here describing. But nothing is more likely than that the idiom of class B is colored by that of class A, in so far as all the instrumentalities of class B are more or less harsh and destructive. The idea of escape from injury and annihilation being uppermost in the mind, as is natural in a more warlike and sanguinary age, classes A and B, distinct in the Latin, might easily approximate more closely to each other in Old English.

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